

Emerging Horticulture in Africa

Trends in Horticultural Economy and Trade in Africa: the Case of the South-West Province of Cameroon

URBAN growth has generated considerable change among small scale farming in West and Central Africa as a growing share of farmers practice farming in an urban environment. Urban growth and the urbanization process of rural areas reduce the availability of potential arable lands. In this context, horticulture is particularly well suited since it requires small land areas and provides high returns on investments. Horticulture is still marginal compared to staple crops but it is a growing activity among farmers in Africa. However, the intensification process emerging in Africa for horticulture suggests careful monitoring.



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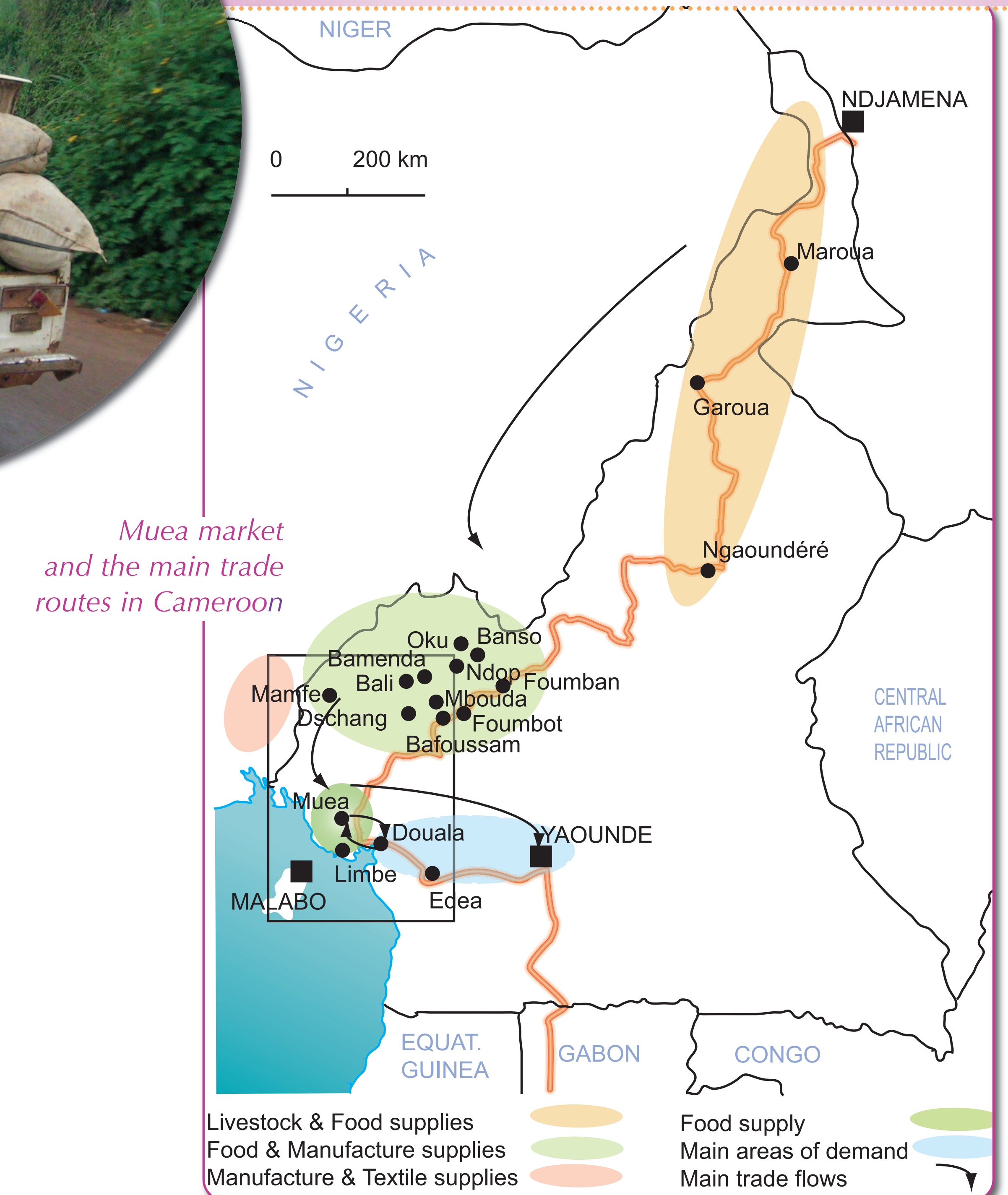
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Urban and periurban agriculture emerging as a major driver of agricultural growth

Urban and periurban agriculture is emerging as a major driver of agricultural growth in developing countries. In Cameroon, the South-West Province is in the midst of the rise of the coastal growth poles in West and Central Africa. By 2020, about 200 million people out of a total of 400 million will live and work in these areas stretching from Dakar (Sénégal) to Douala (Yaoundé). Our case study concerns Muea, a market town in the South West Province of Cameroon. Muea was surveyed in August 1995 and again in June 2004. The surveys included a complete census of households where all houses and households were recorded for a random selection, a household survey where 300 households were interviewed and a market survey.



Change in Africa at the turn of the 21st century

Urban growth affects household income portfolios with a shift between farm and non farm incomes. In our case study, household incomes increased by 14% from 1995 to 2004, with a large shift from farm to nonfarm income. Within agriculture, activity shifted from staple crops to horticulture, both for sale and for home consumption, determining important changes in cropping and farming systems.

Household self-consumption of food crops declined by almost 80% between 1995 and 2004. Self-consumption of food crops also faced a major shift. Self-consumption of horticultural products increased by 48%, while self-consumption of staple crops decreased by 89%. The share of horticulture in self-consumption increased from 6% to 47% of all self-consumption in food crops.

In fact, consumer preferences have changed in Muea with new diets and an increased demand for food.

Perspectives

Horticultural crops provide a better price/weight ratio than staple crops and are well adapted to small scale farming. However, intensification and new land areas remain necessary for keeping up horticultural production with a rising food demand from large cities on the coastal growth pole of Africa. Horticultural crops, as this study revealed, require large amounts of agro-chemical inputs that constitute a potential threat for health and the environment. As perishable crops, they are also vulnerable to the humid climate of Central Africa. Improved storage facilities to reduce waste and improved monitoring of agro-chemical inputs are therefore prerequisites for a sustainable horticulture.



Further reading...

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